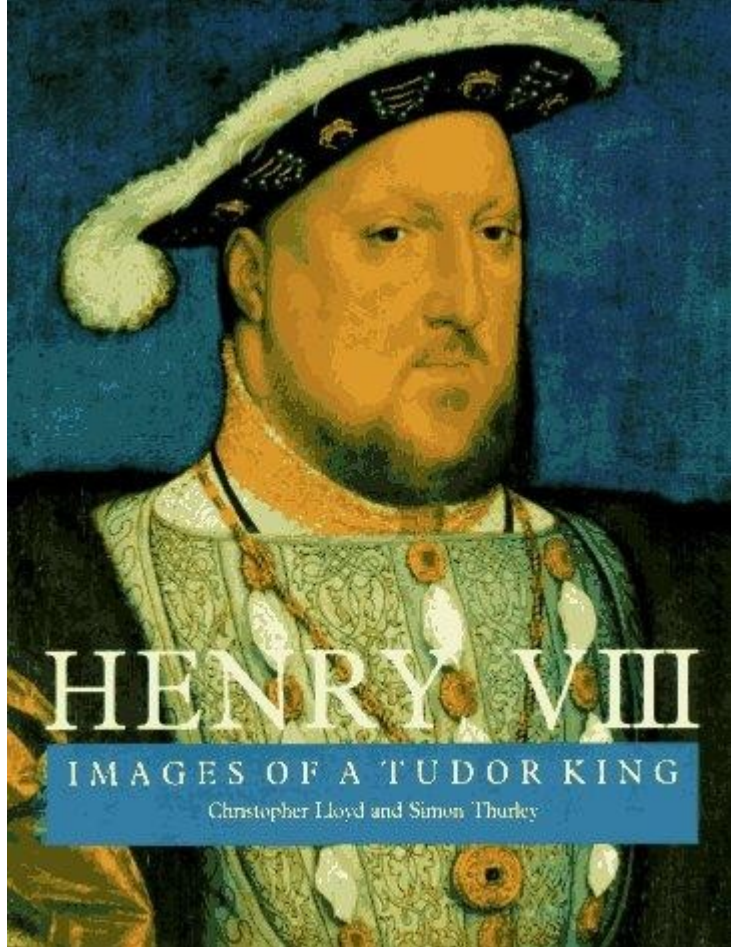




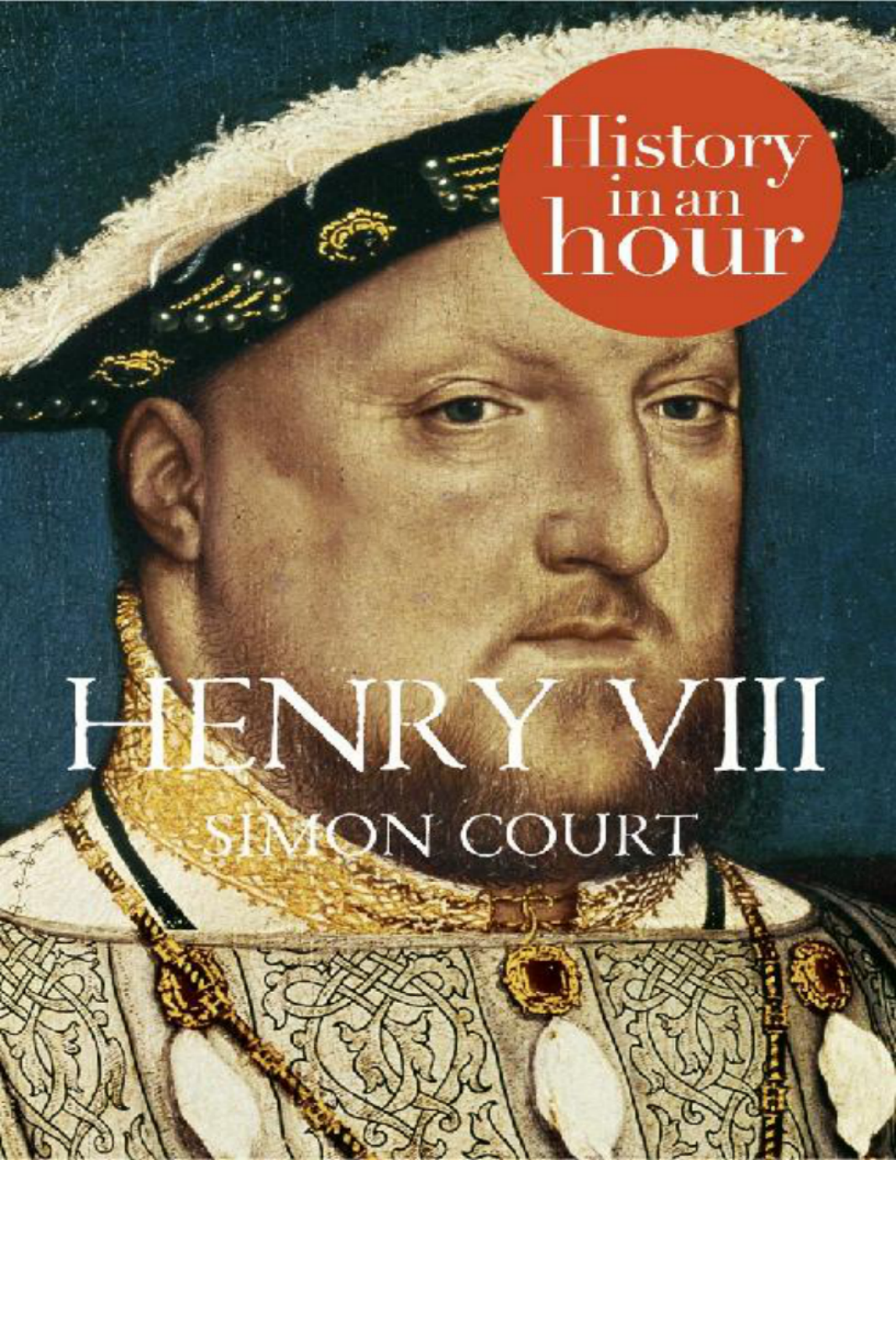
HENRY VIII

IMAGES OF A TUDOR KING

Christopher Lloyd and Simon Thurley

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A detailed portrait of Henry VIII, showing him from the chest up. He is wearing a black cap with a white fur trim and gold embroidery. He has a full beard and is looking slightly to the right. He is wearing a gold chain and a patterned garment with large white buttons.

History
in an
hour

HENRY VIII

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HENRY VIII

History in an Hour

Simon Court



**WILLIAM
COLLINS**

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Introduction

The life of Henry VIII was extraordinarily rich and eventful, starting with high hopes but ending, as he himself would have seen it, in abject personal and therefore political failure, with the premature death of his only son and heir, Edward VI. We have been invited to view Henry's life and personality as, in effect, a tragic 'game of two halves': the first starring the idealistic, athletic and 'virtuous prince'; the second embarrassed by the bloated, disillusioned tyrant who had been corrupted by events which were largely outside his control. And though it may be expected that his personality therefore fundamentally altered for the worse, it is evident that the characteristics which comprised this complex, yet essentially coherent, man were present throughout his life, and the decisions he made. For, possibly more than any other English monarch before or after him, Henry VIII defined every aspect of political life during his reign: indeed we can say that his personality became political policy.

Henry was, to all outward appearances and certainly as portrayed by the court artist Hans Holbein, the perfect model of a successful king. Tall, well built and intelligent, he commanded the stage of his court.

Yet who was the real man those portraits depict, with his fleshy yet mean-lipped face? We will trace the diplomatic ambitions of the young prince, inspired by the 'Arthurian myth' of the English monarch and his empire, and desiring to emulate the military triumphs of Henry V to become King of France as well as England; and the consequences of his continued failure to produce a legitimate male heir, leading eventually to the permanent 'break with Rome' and the Roman Catholic faith. We will also see how his underlying insecurity led to an excessive attachment to his advisers who, once rejected, were brutally abandoned and often beheaded for their betrayals (whether real or imagined). We shall discover a man whose violence, self-righteousness and ruthlessness were certainly consistent with a severe egoist, and perhaps even – some have suggested – with a psychopath.

The 'Virtuous Prince'

Prince Henry was never meant to be king. Born on 28 June 1491 at Greenwich Palace, he was the second son of Henry VII and Elizabeth of York, the first son being Arthur, Prince of Wales. Henry received a first-rate classical and theological education from private tutors, and became fluent in Latin and French. He was also taught to play a number of musical instruments and later composed music (although the long-held belief that he wrote 'Green Sleeves' is probably false). In 1501, Arthur, aged 15, was married to Catherine of Aragon, almost 16 years old, the youngest surviving child of King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile. But disaster struck within a year when Arthur, who was not of robust health, died of pneumonia. Their marriage was probably never consummated.

This tragedy propelled the young Henry, who was only 10 years old, firmly into the spotlight, as the sole male heir to the Tudor dynasty. His father protected him from performing many duties or making public appearances, and he must have been relieved when his second son grew into a fit, athletic young man, standing head and shoulders above his contemporaries. Henry became a skilled horseman, jousting, tennis player and dancer, and possessed great skill in archery and hurling the javelin. By 1508 he was to be seen at Richmond practising tilting for many hours.

Henry VII died on 21 April 1509, and the young Henry, aged 17, became king. In deference to his parents' wishes, he immediately announced that he would marry Catherine of Aragon and, in spite of their six-year age difference, they initially made a happy couple. Catherine conceived within a few weeks of their marriage but, in what proved to be an ominous portent, she was delivered of a stillborn girl. Within four months, however, Catherine had conceived again, this time giving birth on New Year's Day 1511 to a boy, named Henry.

The nation rejoiced at the news, and the king celebrated by jousting under the name of Coeur Loyale ('loyal heart') and laying his trophies at his lady's feet, as befitting a gallant knight.



**Catherine of Aragon watching Henry VIII of England joust,
College of Arms, early sixteenth century**

Yet tragedy struck again seven weeks later when the baby Henry died. Catherine, a devout Catholic, retreated into her devotions; Henry, after a bout of self-doubt and self-pity, turned his energies towards war against France. He knew that the best way for a young ruler to establish his international power and prestige was through warfare, so it was natural for him to pick on one of the two traditional enemies of the English, namely the Scots or the French. But behind this public foreign policy lay a set of deeply held personal beliefs about what it was to be a ruler of men.

Jousting and the Heraldic Past

Henry's love of jousting was not just the enjoyment of the sport; it was an expression of his fundamental belief in the moral virtues of chivalry as personified in the medieval knight. Henry was steeped in the chivalric tradition, believing that it was the duty of every nobleman to display prowess in the joust. Jousting evolved from the practices of medieval battle, where ransoms were sought, and serious injuries inflicted, but by the fifteenth century this had become the tournament in which knights competed for honour and the favour of a lady.

These combats were governed by the strictest rules of engagement and often involved artificial castles, ships or woodland grottos. The nuptials of Arthur and Catherine had been celebrated with such a tournament, and the young Henry had lapped it all up, wishing, like all gentlemen, to excel in the joust. Henry first joined in a tournament incognito in 1510 and he was soon participating regularly, most notably at Westminster in February 1511 to celebrate the birth of his son.

Henry believed that a king must be both a soldier and a man of learning. In promoting these two aspects of kingship – soldier and scholar – Henry was deliberately establishing a different type of identity for a king. His task was made easier by his remarkably varied skills and youthful energy. In addition to his linguistic skills he also had a good knowledge of the Bible, and was a student of mathematics, astronomy, geometry and cartography, and a talented musician with a strong singing voice. When he went on a progress in 1510, he occupied himself 'in shooting, singing, dancing, wrestling, casting of the bar, playing at the recorders, flute and virginals ... jousts and tourneys'. The king was depicting himself to his people as a perfect example of the dashing Renaissance prince, and they adored him for it.

The King of England and of France

How does Henry's view of himself as ruler determine the public foreign policy of his war against France? He was fully aware of the previous triumphs of English monarchs during the Hundred Years' War and their domination of large parts of France during that period. His personal hero was Henry V, and he yearned to recreate the glory of the Battle of Agincourt when, on 25 October 1415 – Saint Crispin's Day – 'King Harry' and his troops killed up to 10,000 French, yet lost only about 110 of their own men. The English claim to the Crown of France had been dormant since 1453, but it had never been renounced and Henry sought to bring it back to English hands.

The opportunity to do so arrived early in his reign. The French were occupying parts of (what is now) Italy and Pope Julius II was trying to put together an alliance to drive them out. When King Ferdinand II of Castile joined forces with him in October 1511 to form the 'Holy League', Henry jumped at the chance to join it and during the following spring a joint Anglo-Spanish attack was made on Aquitaine with the intention of recovering it for England. The attempt was unsuccessful, but the Pope announced that King Louis XII should be stripped of his kingdom of France and of the title 'most Christian king', conferring both on Henry instead. Anticipating a coronation by the Pope himself in Paris, Henry sought to convert this papal pronouncement into concrete political reality.

On 30 June 1513 Henry invaded France. He led his troops down as far as Tournai (which is now in Belgium) and, after a successful siege, made a triumphant ceremonial entry into the town on 25 September. However, the victory was largely symbolic. He made no further inroads into France and had spent his father's treasure in financing the campaign. He ended up being compelled to sign a peace treaty in 1514, and when Louis XII was succeeded by the 20-year-old Francis I, Henry was confronted by a French version of himself, which injected a new competitive dynamic into the Anglo-French relationship.

The Field of Cloth of Gold

Henry and Francis were too alike and too jealous of each other to be friends, but they recognized their mutual strength and avoided direct confrontation. The tense diplomatic stand-off between them was magnificently displayed when they met just outside the English-held territory around Calais in June 1520. This was called the 'Field of Cloth of Gold' – so named because of the silk and gold thread in the hundreds of tents and costumes.

A huge temporary palace was erected for the reception of Henry, where 30-foot-high walls made of canvas were painted to appear as brick or stone, with a slanting cloth roof giving the illusion of leaded slates. Outside, two fountains spouted red wine, and Henry's following alone consumed up to 2,200 sheep in a month. Francis was greatly taken with two monkeys which accompanied Henry's retinue, and insisted that they attend every banquet.

Although the Field of Cloth of Gold was supposed to secure a lasting peace in Europe, it actually achieved nothing. Both as a man and a king Henry remained frustrated. Foolishly, he challenged Francis to a wrestling contest and lost. This severely dented his pride, and soon afterwards the relations between England and France worsened, with Henry forming an alternative alliance with Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, who then declared war on France. The Field of Cloth of Gold ended up symbolizing the ultimate failure of Henry's diplomatic ambitions – with France in particular, and also in general. Throughout the rest of his reign he continually and futilely switched allegiances between the major European powers, and finally in 1544, a last invasion of France succeeded in capturing Boulogne but at the cost of bankruptcy. Henry's dream to emulate the glories of Henry V was never realized.

The 'King's Great Matter'

During Henry's campaign in France in 1513 the Scots took the opportunity to rampage south of the border. Catherine had been left in control during her husband's absence and oversaw an army which defeated the Scots at Flodden. King James IV of Scotland was killed in the battle, and Catherine was able to send Henry his bloodstained hauberk as a trophy. But the marriage was already in difficulties, mostly as a result of Henry's mounting anxiety for a male heir. Catherine lost a child who only lived for a few hours in 1514, and although she gave birth to a healthy daughter, Mary, in 1516, she was always conscious that she was expected to produce a boy. She was now 30 years old, approaching middle age by contemporary standards, and as her beauty faded, Henry's eye started to stray.



It was probably during Catherine's pregnancy with Mary that Henry took his first mistress, the 16-year-old Elizabeth Blount. The affair lasted three years, and Catherine was wise enough to conceal her feelings about it in public. Catherine's Catholic faith supported her in 1518 through another (and final) delivery of a child who did not live long, and the birth of Henry's illegitimate son in 1519, whom the king publicly acknowledged by naming him Henry Fitzroy (meaning 'son of the king').

Henry took the birth of Henry Fitzroy as proof that the problem of securing a male heir was all Catherine's fault, and she became increasingly desperate. While she remained popular with the people and still performed her queenly duties (in 1520 she accompanied Henry to the Field of Cloth of Gold and entertained King Francis I to dinner), her personal relationship with Henry was failing. When she was 35 years old, even though Henry had ended his affair with Elizabeth Blount soon after the birth of their son, he quickly replaced her with another mistress, Mary Boleyn, who was Catherine's lady-in-waiting. Thereafter Henry and Catherine drifted even further apart.

Securing the male succession to the Crown consumed Henry's thoughts, had ruined his first marriage, and would eventually lead to the dramatic break with Rome and the Roman Catholic faith and the establishment of the Church of England. Yet the course which Henry eventually took was not inevitable at the beginning, for Henry was brought up as a devout Catholic. In 1521 he had defended papal supremacy by publishing *Defence of the Seven Sacraments (Assertio)*, which had earned him the cherished title of 'Defender of the Faith' from Pope Leo X. Yet by 1527, with Catherine no longer capable of producing a son, he had formed the conviction that his marriage to her was unlawful in the sight of God. He grounded this belief on a passage in the Old Testament (Leviticus 20:21), which prohibited a man taking his brother's wife. Henry interpreted the original Hebrew text to mean that such a marriage would be 'without sons', and convinced himself that Catherine's prior marriage to his brother Arthur explained why they had no living male heir. So in the summer of 1527 he sent his secretary, William Knight, to Rome to argue that his marriage be annulled, but Knight's mission was completely unsuccessful.

Was Henry's 'scruple of conscience' about his marriage to Catherine genuine, or was it merely an excuse to allow him to annul the marriage and take another wife? We may strongly suspect the latter but cannot know with certainty. What is certain is that by 1527 he had fallen in love with Anne Boleyn, sister of his former mistress

Mary, and his thoughts were turning towards a second marriage with Anne as a way of resolving the question of male succession. Anne likewise realized that the stakes were now so high (for Catherine would never give Henry the legitimate son he needed) that she could resist becoming merely Henry's mistress, and hold out to become the future queen.

In 1529, Henry's Lord Chancellor and chief adviser, Cardinal Wolsey, made further efforts to secure the divorce from Catherine, and was successful in obtaining the Pope's consent to convene an ecclesiastical court in England, to decide the 'Great Matter' once and for all.

But despite protracted proceedings the case was adjourned. It is likely that Pope Clement VII never intended to allow a decision to be reached because he was at the time a hostage of Charles V, who was a loyal nephew to Catherine. Wolsey, who had staked everything on achieving an annulment for his king, was politically ruined, and unceremoniously removed from both his office and his magnificent residence at Hampton Court, which Henry appropriated. Wolsey died in 1530, a broken man.

So Catherine was still queen, and appearing as such for formal events, but Anne Boleyn was Henry's constant companion and her family was gaining increasing political influence at court. This stalemate continued until July 1531, when Catherine refused yet again to accept the annulment, and Henry dismissed her from court. With Cardinal Wolsey dead, Henry became increasingly convinced by the arguments of Protestant advisers like Thomas Cromwell and Thomas Cranmer, and began to believe that the Pope had no right to interfere in England's affairs at all. He took Anne with him to Calais in 1532 to try to obtain the support of King Francis (who managed to avoid meeting her), and it appears that it was on the trip home that Henry and Anne first slept together.

The Break with Rome

By February 1533 Anne was pregnant and secretly married to Henry, and in May the newly appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, convened a special court at Dunstable Priory, which Catherine refused to attend, either in person or by proxy. On 23 May Cranmer found against Catherine, and pronounced Henry's marriage to her null and void. Five days later he ruled that Henry and Anne's marriage was valid and any future children legitimate.

Unsurprisingly the political fallout was enormous. Thomas More, a devout Catholic and supporter of Catherine's cause, who had replaced Wolsey as Lord Chancellor, had already resigned. Catherine's daughter, Princess Mary, refused to accept the diminished status of her mother as 'Dowager Princess of Wales' (in recognition of her position as the widow of Henry's brother) or to acknowledge Anne Boleyn as the new queen. Pope Clement VII initiated the excommunication of Henry and Cranmer.

Anne gave birth to a daughter, Elizabeth, on 7 September 1533. Henry now had two daughters from different marriages but still no legitimate son, and it became necessary to establish what would happen to the succession upon his death. This was achieved by means of a new statute, under the skilful management of the new Lord Chancellor, Thomas Cromwell. The Acts of Succession of 1534 and 1536 established that the Crown would pass first to any male heir of Anne, or failing that, to her daughter, Elizabeth. Mary had no claim as she was declared illegitimate. Also the break with Rome was formally confirmed with Parliament declaring Henry 'the only Supreme Head on Earth of the Church of England', thereby detaching the Church of England from any papal authority.

'The Goggle-eyed Whore': Anne Boleyn

The birth of Elizabeth had been a severe blow to Henry and Anne, because they had confidently anticipated the arrival of a boy, as predicted by the royal physicians and astrologers. In the wake of this disappointment Anne started to grate on Henry. Those traits which had so attracted him in his mistress became unacceptable in a queen. Her intelligent and forcefully articulated views became proud, loud and abrasive to his ears.

After a stillbirth or miscarriage around Christmas 1534, Henry first approached Cranmer and Cromwell to advise on the possibility of divorcing her.

Ironically, it was the death of Catherine in January 1536 which proved to be Anne's death warrant. With Catherine finally out of the picture, Henry was free to consider a third wife without any pressure to return to his first. He started entertaining Jane Seymour at court, who was as different from Anne as she could possibly be: quiet, demure and totally uncritical of Henry. When Henry fell heavily from his horse in a tournament and was unconscious for a number of hours, the shock probably contributed to Anne miscarrying five days later. The child appeared to be male. This led Eustace Chapuys, the Holy Roman Empire's ambassador to England, to observe 'She has miscarried of her saviour.' Anne's days were numbered.

Cromwell was given the task of arranging her removal. He had clashed with her and her family over the future direction of foreign policy (Anne was passionately pro-French while Cromwell inclined towards the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V) so he was more than happy to orchestrate her fall. He hatched a brutal plot which neatly side-stepped any possibility of her replacing Catherine as a vocal and resentful ex-wife. He wanted her executed, and to do this he had her accused of treason by reason of her adultery. Anne had usually been very shrewd about what she said or did around Henry, but she made a disastrous mistake when she allowed it to be known at court that Henry had become a very erratic performer in bed. This did nothing to help her in what was to come.

In April 1536 a Flemish musician in Anne's service, Mark Smeaton, was arrested. He denied being the queen's lover, but later confessed, probably because he was tortured. Other arrests rapidly followed. The next day it was the turn of Anne herself and Sir Henry Norris, who, as an aristocrat, could not be tortured. Then Anne's brother, Lord Rochford, was accused of incest with his sister. Following this Sir

Francis Weston, Sir William Brereton, Sir Richard Page and the poet Sir Thomas Wyatt were also apprehended. All the accused but Wyatt were members of the king's Privy Chamber, and all had been identified as political allies of Anne, but these charges of adultery were clearly preposterous. Apart from the tortured Smeaton, they all maintained their innocence throughout.

Of all the charges, that of incest between Anne and her brother Rochford was the most ridiculous. Anne pleaded with Henry to ensure a fair trial, saying 'try me, good king, but let me have a lawful trial, and let not my sworn enemies sit as my accusers and judges'. However, the trial itself was a legal travesty, with all the salacious details of the alleged acts described, as sister's tongue found brother's open mouth, and vice versa, leading one of Anne's judges, John Spelman, to observe that 'all the evidence was bawdy and lechery'. Unsurprisingly, all the men accused (except Page and Wyatt) were found guilty and executed on 17 May.

Anne's own execution was on 19 May; and two days before Cranmer had declared her marriage to Henry invalid. This was a legal nonsense, given that she could only have committed adultery if the original marriage was valid, but it served the desired purpose of making Elizabeth illegitimate. Henry became engaged to Jane Seymour the day after Anne's execution, and on 30 May they married in private. The relentless search for a male heir had cost a second queen.

Anne was courageous in the face of death. Henry had commuted her sentence from burning to beheading, and brought over an expert swordsman from France. Anne was reported to say 'I heard say the executioner was very good, and I have a little neck', before putting her hands around her neck and laughing. The execution was by a single stroke, and was witnessed by a crowd including Thomas Cromwell and the King's illegitimate son, Henry Fitzroy.

A King is Born

In early 1537 Jane became pregnant and developed a craving for quail, which necessitated the import of supplies from Calais and Flanders. On 12 October she gave birth to a son, the future King Edward VI, at Hampton Court Palace. The birth was difficult, with labour lasting two nights and three days, and soon afterwards Jane fell seriously ill with a fever. Less than two weeks later she died, and was the only one of Henry's wives to receive a queen's funeral. She was buried on 12 November in St George's Chapel at Windsor Castle, with Mary acting as chief mourner. Although only 29 years old when she died, Jane Seymour had done what Henry wanted: she had provided a male heir to the English throne.

Her infant son Edward was christened on 15 October, with both Henry's daughters, Mary and Elizabeth, attending. (Henry would prove as protective of Edward as his own father had been of him, but to little avail – when Henry died in 1547 the sickly Edward was only 9 years old and would himself die in 1553, at the age of 15, rendering every brutal act performed by Henry to secure a legitimate male heir an eventual failure.)



Portrait of Edward VI as a child by Hans Holbein, c.1539

The years 1536 and 1537 were emotionally turbulent for Henry. The deaths of Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn were followed by the loss of his illegitimate son, Henry Fitzroy, who succumbed to consumption on 23 July 1536, aged only 17. Henry reacted badly to his son's death, and the joy and relief that he felt with the birth of Edward was immediately tempered by the death of Jane Seymour nearly two weeks later. Though Thomas Cromwell began at once to look for another wife for Henry, the king wore black in honour of Jane for three months and didn't marry for another three years. It was during this period of widowhood that Henry, now 46 years old and middle-aged by contemporary standards, started to become the swollen and obese figure of his last years.

The Reformation and the Dissolution of the Monasteries

Though Henry was a devout Catholic, he became increasingly suspicious of the rituals and practices of the Catholic monastic Orders. In this he was heavily influenced by the humanist views articulated by fellow Catholics Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More, who argued that most of the monastic communities were insufficiently pious and contributed little to the spiritual needs of the people. Indeed, Erasmus and More were shocked to observe how even well-educated monks and nuns perpetuated the superstitious veneration of relics and miraculous tokens, which they believed amounted to a fraud against credulous lay believers. Henry shared the humanist horror in the use of false relics. There was also the fact that up to a quarter of the nation's landed wealth was hoarded by the monasteries, rather than being distributed to good causes such as schools and universities.

In April 1533 an Act in Restraint of Appeals was passed, which provided that all ecclesiastical charges and levies which had previously been paid to Rome were to be redirected to the king. In 1534, two Acts of Parliament were passed which cemented the break with Rome: the Act of Supremacy declared that the king was 'the only Supreme Head on Earth of the Church of England', and the Treasons Act made it high treason, punishable by death, to refuse the Oath of Supremacy acknowledging the king as Head of the Church as much as Head of State. Thomas More and John Fisher, the Bishop of Rochester, refused to take the oath and were both executed in 1535.



Portrait of Thomas More by Hans Holbein, c.1527

Henry now believed that he was entrusted with the Church of England, and would be answerable before God for the purity of its faith. He saw one of his spiritual tasks as the removal of the impious practices of the Catholic monasteries, just as one of his political tasks was to siphon off the wealth contained in them.

Henry asked Cromwell to undertake a detailed review of the endowments and incomes of the monasteries. The commissioners appointed to visit them were generally sceptical about their merits, and by 1535 they were writing unflattering reports to Cromwell about the 'impropriety' of what they had witnessed. Armed with this information and his new legislative powers, Henry chose to wield the bluntest of instruments: the passing of the Suppression of Religious

Houses Act in 1535 enabled him to simply dissolve those religious houses that were failing to maintain a sufficiently religious life.

By 1541 all 800 monasteries, priories, convents and friaries in England, Wales and Ireland were dissolved, their assets disposed of, and their vast incomes handed over to the Crown. One reason the dissolution was achieved relatively easily was because the nobility and gentry were given a substantial share of the spoils, so were disinclined to protest.

However, the reaction was different in the north of England, where there was spirited opposition to the monastic dissolution, resulting in an uprising in Lincolnshire in October 1536. This was shortly followed by another popular uprising across Yorkshire, known as the 'Pilgrimage of Grace'. Up to 20,000 armed protestors gathered at Doncaster, led by the London barrister Robert Aske. Henry was sufficiently concerned to promise a general pardon to all those participating in the Pilgrimage and to offer a reprieve for the abbeys until a Parliament was held the following year in either Nottingham or York to resolve the protestors' grievances. Aske decided to trust Henry and sent his supporters home, but Henry went back on his promise and had Aske arrested and hanged in chains from the walls of York Castle. About 130 others were also executed. He met with little further resistance.

By 1539 Cromwell had persuaded Henry to sanction the first publication of an authorized English Bible (or 'Great Bible'), which went a long way to establishing the credibility of the Church of England.

The 'Fat Flanders Mare': Anne of Cleves

Over two years had passed since the death of Jane Seymour before Henry finally accepted Cromwell's suggestion that he marry again. Anne of Cleves came from a wealthy German family and was the sister of Duke Wilhelm of Cleves, whose ongoing territorial dispute with Emperor Charles V made the family suitable allies for the king. The royal artist Holbein had been dispatched to Cleves to paint both the 24-year-old Anne, and her sister Amalia, whom Henry was also considering for a wife.

Henry had instructed Holbein to be as accurate as possible, and the resulting portrait was attractive enough to persuade Henry to marry her.

Anne duly arrived at Dover on 27 December 1539 and, with a return to his old sense of gallantry, Henry decided to intercept her incognito at Rochester. But the meeting was a disaster, for when Henry invaded her chamber with companions (also disguised) Anne probably feared an abduction and, speaking no English, she was incapable of making the witty response which Henry probably expected. And to make matters worse, he was very disappointed at what he saw, saying that 'She is nothing so fair as she hath been reported', and reputedly calling her a 'fat Flanders mare'. He immediately urged Cromwell to find a way to get out of the marriage, but Cromwell insisted that the alliance with the Germans was too important to be endangered.

Reluctantly Henry went ahead and married Anne on 6 January 1540. The wedding night was not a success, with Henry confiding to Cromwell that 'I liked her before not well, but now I like her much worse.' Anne's own account that Henry would at bedtime only 'kisseth me and biddeth "Farewell, darling"' was met with the sternly pragmatic response of Lady Rutland: 'Madam, there must be more than this, or it will be long ere we have a duke of York, which all this realm most desireth.' Lady Rutland and the realm were to be disappointed: Henry suddenly announced that the marriage had never been consummated, and unceremoniously bundled Anne out of his court on 24 June. With unseemly haste, the marriage was annulled on 9 July. Unlike Catherine of Aragon, Anne had immediately agreed to consent to the annulment, and this co-operation ensured her a generous settlement, which included Hever Castle, the former home of the disgraced Boleyns. Indeed, over time she became good friends with Henry, and he referred to her as 'the King's Beloved Sister'.

The Gruesome End of Thomas Cromwell

Thomas Cromwell, by contrast, met a much less appealing fate. He had invested his reputation in the Cleves marriage and its abject failure was laid at his door. Henry had already become enamoured with a young and precocious lady-in-waiting called Catherine Howard, the niece of the Duke of Norfolk, who was a powerful enemy of Cromwell. Yet again Henry's love life would have direct political consequences, for others as much as for him.

Henry had become distanced from his Chancellor after the Cleves fiasco and with Norfolk's collusion Cromwell found himself charged with a variety of unlikely offences including corruption, heresy and treason. There was no concrete evidence to support any of this, but he was condemned to death without trial, with all honours forfeited.

There has been much speculation about his execution on 28 July 1540, the same day Henry married Catherine Howard. One suggestion is that Cromwell's enemies deliberately arranged that his beheading would be botched, by getting the executioner so drunk the night before that it took half an hour before his head was finally severed. Another account says that Cromwell faced an inexperienced teenager who took three strokes to succeed. Both appear unlikely, although the London Chronicler Edward Halle observed that Cromwell 'patiently suffered the stroke of the axe, by a ragged Boocherly miser whiche very ungoodly perfourmed the Office'. Clearly something went badly wrong, but it remains unclear whether the gruesome end of Thomas Cromwell was simply a matter of human error, or whether there was something more sinister afoot.

When Cromwell was arrested in June, Cranmer had written to Henry, saying, 'Who cannot be sorrowful and amazed that he should be a traitor against your majesty? ... who shall your grace trust hereafter, if you might not trust him? Alas!' Henry later came to regret Cromwell's execution, and accused his ministers of bringing false charges against him.

The 'Lewd and Naughty' Catherine Howard

When Henry married the 17-year-old Catherine Howard he was touching 50 years old and quite possibly sexually impotent. He was certainly obese and in continual pain with a seeping pustulous leg wound caused by a jousting injury he had suffered four years earlier. He was clearly physically repulsive and bad-tempered – a blustering old man bragging about his new young wife – and it is no surprise that his marriage to the vivacious, giggly and sexually frustrated Catherine was a disaster almost from the start.



**Miniature portrait of Catherine Howard by Hans Holbein,
c.1541**

Within six months, Catherine appears to have started an affair with Thomas Culpepper, who was Henry's favourite among the Gentlemen of the Privy Chamber. Their trysts were arranged by Lady Rochford, who was the widow of George Boleyn, and who therefore had a substantial axe to grind. The queen would 'in every house seek for the backdoors and backstairs herself' and her indiscretions with Culpepper were inevitably witnessed by others, who sought favours in exchange for their silence, and were often appointed to the royal household. Most notably, Francis Dereham, who had been her lover before her marriage, persuaded Catherine to appoint him as her personal secretary.

By the end of 1541 Catherine's affairs with Dereham and Culpepper had become widely known to the court, but not to Henry. She was yet to be pregnant (indeed their relationship may never have been consummated) and therefore her position was extremely dangerous. On 7 November, Cranmer was sent to question her about the rumours. He found her 'in such lamentation and heaviness as I never saw no creature, so that it would have pitied any man's heart to have looked upon her'. She confessed to her affair with Dereham, although she claimed that he had raped her.

When Cranmer informed Henry he initially refused to believe that his 'rose without a thorn' could prove to be so prickly, but when Dereham confessed he went into a rage. On 23 November Catherine was stripped of her title as queen and imprisoned in Syon Abbey. On 10 December Culpepper and Dereham were both executed at Tyburn, their heads placed on top of London Bridge. Catherine was tried and further confessed to having a sexual relationship with her old music teacher, Henry Manno, when she was 13.

On 7 February 1542 Parliament declared it treasonable and punishable by death for a queen to fail to disclose her sexual history to the king, or to incite someone to commit adultery with her. Catherine was, of course, found guilty on both counts. The night before her execution On 13 February, Catherine requested that the block which was to be used to kill her be brought to her cell, and she spent hours practising laying her head upon it. Barely able to climb the scaffold, she is understood to have uttered her final words 'I die a queen, but I would rather have died the wife of Culpepper.' She was beheaded with a single stroke, and Lady Rochford was executed after her. Both were buried in an unmarked grave in the chapel of St Peter ad Vincula. The bodies of Catherine's cousins Anne and George Boleyn lay nearby.

Henry did not attend either the execution or the burial. On hearing about her execution, Francis I of France wrote to him, regretting the 'lewd and naughty behaviour of the Queen' and advising him that 'the

lightness of women cannot bend the honour of men’.

Death and Succession

When Henry condemned his fifth wife to death in 1542 he was nearly 51 years old, obese and ill. Yet a year later, in a triumph of hope over experience, he married the wealthy widow Catherine Parr, and spent the final three and a half years of his life in relative domestic tranquillity. No one, least of all Henry, expected any more children, so thoughts turned to his existing family issues.

Catherine is said to have been the only person who could successfully dress Henry's increasingly putrid leg wound, and perhaps that best explains why no more marital heads were to roll. Catherine was also probably partially responsible for Henry becoming more reconciled with his two daughters, Mary and Elizabeth, and she was friendly to Henry's 6-year-old son, Edward.

In 1544 the Act of Succession re-established Mary, followed by Elizabeth, in succession after Edward. This was a radical departure from the customary rules of primogeniture, under which if both Henry and Edward had died without further male heirs, the succession would have passed to the male descendants of Henry's elder sister, Margaret. Likewise, both Mary and Elizabeth had been previously declared illegitimate by statutes which had not been subsequently repealed, and there were no criteria by which both daughters could be said to have been born in lawful marriage. In placing both the king's natural daughters in the succession without making any attempt to legitimize either of them, Parliament had shown that, with the collusion of the king, it could in effect enact whatever it wanted.

It is perhaps fitting that Henry's last significant act involved a flourishing return to his ideal of the monarch as a chivalrous knight. Between July and September 1544 he embarked on his final military campaign in France. Just like his first expedition in 1513, it was ultimately unsuccessful, although enormously enjoyable, particularly when Henry entered the town of Boulogne in ceremonial triumph. The fact that he had to be hoisted by crane onto his war horse didn't dampen his enthusiasm. And tellingly, the practical affairs of state were capably dealt with in his absence by Catherine, acting as his regent, with a council composed of Protestant sympathizers such as her uncle Thomas Cranmer.

Henry died on 28 January 1547 aged 55 years. It is not clear what caused his death – the popular belief that he suffered from syphilis has now been discredited. The cause is more likely to be his ulceration in both legs (probably also caused by bone fragments broken off in a

riding accident), his obesity and immobility: at the end he could scarcely walk, being moved around on specially constructed chairs. When Cranmer rushed to Henry's death bed in the Palace of Whitehall he found the king speechless: when he squeezed Henry's hand and asked him if he still believed in the saving mercy of God Henry 'did wring his hand as hard as he could'. A few hours later Henry died, having left it too late to summon Catherine or Mary to attend him.

The official announcement of Henry's death was delayed until the following Monday, 31 January. The intestines were removed and the body was embalmed. It was placed in a sealed lead coffin which was enclosed in an elmwood casket. After lying in state for over a fortnight, Henry, in accordance with his wishes, set off on 14 February on his final royal tour towards Windsor. During the journey the entourage rested at Syon-on-Thames in what, ironically, used to be a convent until Henry had dissolved it. It has been claimed that while at Syon Henry's corpse swelled and burst with such violence that bodily fluids seeped onto the floor, and wandering dogs licked them up. Whether this indignity really befell Henry is not clear: the story could have been invented by Cardinal William Peto, who had warned Henry that his sins could, like the fate of King Ahab in the Old Testament, bring dogs to lick his blood. Yet whenever Henry's tomb has been opened, rents in the coffin and the casket have indeed been observed.

Henry had instructed that he should be interred with Jane Seymour in a black sarcophagus which was originally intended for Thomas Wolsey. But Henry's wishes were ignored, and instead Jane Seymour's existing grave was opened up and Henry was buried beside her in St George's Chapel, Windsor. (The sarcophagus remained empty until it was appropriated by Parliament to bury Horatio Nelson. So Henry VIII of England and France, who was so keen throughout his life to be hailed as a military hero of the nation, was usurped in death by a true one.)

So what of Henry's dynasty, which had determined most of his key political decisions, including the execution of two wives and two trusted advisers? After his death Edward, his only legitimate son, inherited the Crown, becoming Edward VI. But Edward was only 9 years old, so Henry determined in his will that sixteen executors should serve on a council of regency until Edward reached the age of 18. Jane Seymour's elder brother, Edward Seymour, was elected Lord Protector of the Realm. When Edward VI died in 1553, aged only 15, he was replaced by Henry's eldest daughter, Mary. A Catholic like her mother, Mary sought to repudiate what Henry had achieved, blaming Cranmer for most of her father's reformist measures, and ordering his public execution by burning. When Mary died without heirs in 1558, the Crown passed to Elizabeth, Anne Boleyn's daughter. The reign of

Elizabeth I was (arguably) successful and certainly long, ending with her death in 1603. However, Elizabeth never married and had no heirs, and so the Tudor dynasty ended with her.

Personality as Political Policy

Henry's person and personality was vast both literally and metaphorically, and we have observed how others were drawn as if by a centripetal force into his court only to be later flung from its orbit. For sitting in the middle of all political life and decision-making was a man whose obsession with securing a male heir determined the lives of all those around him. The lack of a son led directly to the falls of Wolsey, More, Catherine of Aragon and Anne Boleyn; and indirectly to the fates of Cromwell, Anne of Cleves and Catherine Howard. For Henry, personality was political policy.

This made living around him extremely precarious. To be in favour was to secure great privileges, while to fall out of favour was to put your life in mortal danger. And there was little comfort or safety in numbers. Factions could be formed in court which usurped one another; families such as the Boleyns and the Howards could benefit handsomely during their period of influence, but their demise was often dramatic and total. The ruthless brutality of Henry and the paranoia of his court were established from the outset. Two days after his coronation in June 1509, the 18-year-old Henry arrested two of his father's ministers, Sir Richard Empson and Edmund Dudley, on the grounds of treason. They were both executed in 1510. And his self-absorption was also revealed early in his life, most clearly in the preposterous indulgences of the failed military campaign in France in 1513, and the Field of Cloth of Gold in 1520. So we must see the later violent episodes in his life as a continuation, and indeed repetition, of behavioural traits established at the beginning. After all, anyone can be sweet-natured while everything is going to plan, and it was only during the late 1520s when the 'King's Great Matter' had become a fully blown crisis that Henry was really tested, and revealed, as a result, his true underlying character.

So who exactly is staring back at us when we look at the portraits of Henry? Clearly, he is a man whose self-righteousness, sexual insecurity and ruthlessness was sketched out from the start, and whose violence became more obvious as personal (and hence political) disappointments befell him. But is there more to be deduced from his behaviour, and if so, what is it?

Henry Tudor: Psychological Post-mortem

The action-packed story of the life of King Henry VIII is popularly consumed so often as entertainment (as the inspiration for so many books, films and TV series) that it is possible to overlook the alarming pile of headless corpses that mounted up. How can they be explained? If we step back from the drama and examine the man at the centre, we see a person who even beyond the astonishing treatment of various wives, formed three close personal relationships with male confidants – two of which (Wolsey and More) were filial or avuncular in nature. Yet when confronted by a frustration or disappointment, due largely to external forces outside anyone's control, Henry reacted with violent rejection, or even lethal persecution. It is unlikely that any of his main confidants – Wolsey, More and Cromwell – had betrayed Henry yet they paid a terrible price for their loyal service.

So we see a man who could kill his advisers for committing errors rather than crimes, and who found no difficulty authorizing the murder of two women he had loved.



Portrait of older Henry after Hans Holbein, 1542

And taking these character traits together some have formed a picture, or a 'profile', which makes for uncomfortable viewing, what is latterly called a psychopath.

This startling possibility has recently been supported in a scientific study conducted by Professor Kevin Dutton at Oxford. Ten English political leaders were analysed (including, interestingly, Henry's daughter, Elizabeth I) against a 'psychopathic spectrum' in which the minimum score of a person with psychopathic tendencies was 168. Nine of the ten scored less than 168. One of the ten scored 174: Henry VIII. He scored particularly highly for 'emotional detachment' and 'cold-hearted ruthlessness'. So could this mean that one of our most iconic monarchs was a fully blown psychopath? The study concluded that Henry fell short of that, but only just: as Professor Dutton put it, Henry was 'not a psychopath, but a cold, paranoid manipulator. Not a

nice chap at all.' If not psychopathic, then Henry was perhaps sociopathic – a prominent and perverse man who continues to draw the fascination of not just scholars and academics, but history enthusiasts everywhere.

Appendix 1: Key Players

Catherine of Aragon (1485–1536)

Born in Madrid, the youngest surviving child of King Ferdinand II of Aragon and Queen Isabella I of Castile, Catherine had long red hair, blue eyes and a fair complexion. By the age of 3 she had become betrothed to Prince Arthur, the heir-apparent to the English Crown, marrying him in 1501. A widow a year later, she married Henry VIII in 1509. Throughout their marriage Catherine was pregnant six times, but only Mary survived to adulthood. Divorced from Henry in 1533, she died 3 years later, aged 50.

Well educated and spirited, Catherine had studied religion, the Classics and Latin. She commissioned the controversial book by Juan Luis Vives, *The Education of a Christian Woman*, which argued that women had the right to be educated, and donated to several colleges which encouraged female education. She also started a programme for the relief of the poor. With Henry in France in 1513 and the Scots invading England, she rode north in full armour to address the troops, despite being heavily pregnant. When Henry pressurized her to accept an annulment and retire quietly to a nunnery she resolutely refused, saying defiantly, ‘God never called me to a nunnery, I am the king’s true and lawful wife.’ It was this courage which led her supporter Thomas More to say that ‘There are few women who could compete with the Queen in her prime’, and drew her opponent Thomas Cromwell to acknowledge that ‘If not for her sex, she could have defied all the heroes of History.’

A devout Catholic and a member of the Third Order of Saint Francis, she confined herself in her final years to one room, dressed only in the hair shirt of her Order, and fasting continuously. For refusing to recognize Anne Boleyn as Henry’s legitimate new queen, she was forbidden to see her daughter, Mary, again. Yet close to her death, her final letter to Henry, her ‘most dear lord and husband’, is forgiving. She wrote, ‘For my part, I pardon thou everything, and I desire to devoutly pray God that He will pardon thou also.’ The letter ends: ‘Lastly, I makest this vogue [vow], that mine eyes desire thou aboute all things.’ Highly respected and mourned among the people, Catherine is buried in Peterborough Cathedral.

Thomas Wolsey (1473–1530)

Born in Ipswich of a humble family, Wolsey studied theology at Magdalen College, Oxford, before serving Henry VII as royal chaplain. When the new king Henry VIII appointed Wolsey as Almoner a close personal relationship developed between them. They shared a love of pomp and circumstance, while Henry's disinterest in the tedious details of government was dealt with by the extremely industrious Wolsey. Henry had total confidence in him, and granted him a great deal of freedom and power within his court, so that he rapidly became the dominant, even overwhelming force, and chief adviser to the king.

Wolsey was always highly pragmatic in dealing with the king. When Henry sought to invade France, Wolsey changed his mind about the merits of doing so and organized the logistics of the military campaign. He was also key in the peace negotiations of 1514, ensuring that Henry kept his prized possession of Tournai. He was later to organize the extravagant summit meeting at the Field of Cloth of Gold.

In 1514, Wolsey became Archbishop of York, and in 1515 Lord Chancellor, and a cardinal. As such, Wolsey had both a political and religious role in Henry's service, and was also Papal Legate in England. The issue of the annulment of Henry's marriage to Catherine led eventually to his downfall, as Pope Clement VII's continual delays in coming to a decision led Henry to start doubting Wolsey's loyalty. By July 1529 Henry had had enough and sought to remove Wolsey from both office and memory. He was arrested and stripped of his government office and (by now substantial) property. This included the recently expanded residence of Hampton Court, which Henry decided to occupy himself, instead of the Palace of Westminster. Cardinal College in Oxford, which Wolsey had founded, was renamed King's College, and later became known as Christ Church. Wolsey was, however, allowed to remain Archbishop of York, but while travelling to his diocese he was accused of treason and ordered back to London. In great distress, he fell ill on the journey and died aged 57.

He is quoted as saying: 'If I had served my God as diligently as I did my king, He would not have given me over in my grey hairs.' Although he had planned to be buried in a magnificent tomb in Windsor, he was buried in Leicester Abbey without a monument. He left two children, who were the offspring of a relationship with Joan Larke, whom Wolsey had arranged to be married off to someone else to avoid embarrassment.

Thomas More (1478–1535)

A dominant intellectual force of his generation, a devout Catholic and lawyer whose interests extended to philosophy, statesmanship and

humanism, More was born the son of Sir John More, himself a successful lawyer and judge. Thomas studied at Oxford and then Lincoln's Inn before being called to the Bar in 1502. Elected to Parliament in 1504, he became increasingly influential as an adviser to Henry VIII. In 1521, he assisted Henry in writing the *Assertio*, a formal response to the Protestant radical Martin Luther's attack on Catholicism. In 1523, he became the Speaker of the House of Commons, and succeeded Wolsey as Lord Chancellor in 1529.

More became increasingly worried about Henry's leanings towards the Protestant Reformation, which he considered to be heretical. He had earlier assisted Wolsey in preventing the spread of the writings of Luther, and was later to suppress the use of William Tyndale's English translation of the New Testament in churches. His spiritual life is reputed to have included practices such as wearing a hair shirt next to his skin and occasional self-flagellation.

In 1530, More refused to sign a letter from leading churchmen and aristocrats to Pope Clement VII requesting the annulment of Henry's marriage to Catherine, and by May 1532 he was forced to resign as Lord Chancellor. After refusing to attend the coronation of Anne Boleyn a year later, he was charged with accepting bribes and conspiracy but successfully defended himself. When he and John Fisher, the Bishop of Rochester, refused to take the Oath of Supremacy or to acknowledge that Catherine's marriage was lawfully annulled, he was arrested for treason in 1534 and imprisoned in the Tower of London.

In July 1535, More was brought to trial. A lawyer to the last, he sought to rely on the legal precedent that 'who is silent is seen to consent' and he argued that he could not be convicted of high treason for failing to take the Oath of Supremacy if he did not expressly deny that the king was the Supreme Head of the Church. However, the Solicitor-General Richard Rich testified that More had made such a denial in his presence, and although this testimony was highly dubious, it took just fifteen minutes for the jury to find More guilty. Mounting the steps of the scaffold, More said 'see me safe up and for my coming down, I can shift for myself', and declared that he died 'the king's good servant, but God's first'. In 1935, Pope Pius XI canonized both More and John Fisher.

Anne Boleyn (1501/7–36)

Although a lack of parish records makes it impossible to know Anne Boleyn's exact date and place of birth, she was the daughter of Sir Thomas Boleyn and his wife Lady Elizabeth Howard. Thomas Boleyn served as a diplomat under Henry VIII, and Anne spent nearly seven

years in France as maid-of-honour to Queen Claude, wife of Francis I. This gave her a love of all things French, and in particular the game of courtly love and flirtation. In 1522, Anne was recalled to England to marry her Irish cousin, James Butler, but when the marriage negotiations broke down, she joined Henry's court as a lady-in-waiting to Catherine of Aragon. She entered into a secret betrothal with the aristocrat Henry Percy, but again this came to nothing, as Cardinal Wolsey forbade the match.

Anne's looks were dramatic. She was small and slender with an olive complexion, a strong nose and thick dark hair. These good looks were coupled with a fine independent intelligence and keen wit, and she held forthright opinions while being charming and graceful. Yet Anne also had a fierce temper and a sharp tongue. On meeting her, Henry embarked on a seven-year relationship of courtly love. It appears to have been unconsummated until 1532, and Henry's sexual attraction to, and frustration with, her was clear as he drooled at her 'pretty dukkys' (breasts). They were often seen quarrelling with each other.

Anne's marriage to Henry was a political triumph for her family. Her father, already promoted to Viscount Rochford, was created Earl of Wiltshire. The family chaplain to the Boleyns, Thomas Cranmer, was appointed Archbishop of Canterbury. Yet the public disliked her for usurping Catherine's place and she was called variously 'The Goggle-eyed Whore', 'The Great Whore' and 'The King's Whore'. The Imperial ambassador Chapuys continued to refer to her as 'the concubine' and 'the she-devil' in his dispatches. She was accused of using magic skills to captivate Henry, and was alleged to have six fingers on her right hand, a sure sign of her witchcraft. Yet when her body was exhumed from an unmarked grave in the Chapel of St Peter ad Vincula (the parish church of the Tower of London) in 1876, they found five finely formed tapering fingers.

Jane Seymour (1508–37)

Jane Seymour was not as highly educated as Henry's previous two wives, being far more adept at the domestic skills of needlework and household management than reading and writing. After becoming a maid-of-honour to Queen Catherine in 1532, she was serving Queen Anne when Henry took an interest in her in early 1536. Possessing a somewhat childlike face and very pale, her motto, on becoming queen herself, was 'Bound to obey and serve', and it was this uncritical willingness to obey the king's commands which now appealed to Henry, who had been bruised by the spirit and resistance of both Catherine and Anne. Her only known foray into political affairs was

when she asked the king to pardon the participants in the Pilgrimage of Grace, but this was firmly rejected. Her compassion and sympathy towards Catherine's daughter Mary made her popular with the people, and her loyalty to Henry in life was acknowledged in death when he insisted he be buried beside her.

Thomas Cromwell (1485–1540)

Like his mentor Cardinal Wolsey, Thomas Cromwell came from a modest background: his father was variously a cloth merchant, fuller and blacksmith, and the owner of both a brewery and a hostelry (where he allegedly watered down the beer). Born around 1485 in Putney, his birthplace is now, ironically, where the Green Man public house stands. He acknowledged that he had been a 'ruffian ... in his younger days', when he left his family for the continent and became a mercenary who marched with the French army. He later entered the household of the Florentine banker, Francesco Frescobaldi.

Returning to England, he married Elizabeth Wyckes and had three children. In 1523, he became a member of the House of Commons, and in 1524, he was elected as a member of Gray's Inn and entered the service of Cardinal Wolsey. He served Wolsey as his lawyer and was heavily involved in the dissolution of nearly thirty monasteries, which raised the funds to found both The King's School, Ipswich, and Cardinal College, Oxford. When Wolsey fell from power in 1530 he was appointed to the Privy Council.

Cromwell was possessed with genuine reforming zeal and a loathing for what he perceived to be the superstitions and corruptions of the Catholic monks. Along with his fellow Protestants Anne Boleyn and Thomas Cranmer, he was instrumental in the achievement of the break with Rome. At the height of his career, Cromwell was central to the annulment of the marriage to Catherine, the rise and fall of Anne Boleyn, the execution of Thomas More, and the dissolution of the monasteries. In 1536 he was raised to the peerage as Baron Cromwell of Wimbledon, and in April 1540 he became Earl of Essex. Yet his support for the disastrous marriage to Anne of Cleves led to his abrupt downfall in 1540, followed by his botched execution and his head on a pike on London Bridge. He was 55 years old when he died.

That other famous Cromwell, Oliver Cromwell, the Parliamentary leader during the English Civil War and later Lord Protector, was a great-great-grandson of Thomas Cromwell's sister, Katherine Williams, whose husband assumed the Cromwell name.

Anne of Cleves (1515–57)

Born in Düsseldorf, Germany, Anne was the second daughter of John III, Duke of Cleves. At the age of 12 she was betrothed to Francis, son of the Duke of Lorraine, but the betrothal was cancelled. Anne lacked both education and sophistication: her main skills were in needlework and card games, and she could read and write only in German. Yet she was considered to be gentle, docile and virtuous, and possessed hair that was 'fair, yellow and long': a suitable candidate, to all appearances, to be the fourth wife of Henry VIII.

After her doomed marriage to Henry she retired to the English countryside but remained on good terms with Henry and was often invited to court. Her last public appearance was to attend Mary I's coronation, and she died aged 41 in 1557 and was buried in Westminster Abbey, having outlived all of Henry VIII's other wives.

Catherine Howard (1523–42)

The daughter of Lord Edmund Howard and a niece of Elizabeth Howard, the mother of Anne Boleyn, Catherine Howard was a first cousin to Anne. Her mother died in her early childhood so she was sent to live with the Dowager Duchess of Norfolk. Her uncle, the Duke of Norfolk, succeeded in placing her at court and she quickly caught the eye of Henry. He bestowed lavish gifts of land and expensive cloth on her, and by 1540 they were married.

The Howard family used Catherine's marriage to exert influence on the king, including encouraging the removal of Thomas Cromwell. They were Catholics who were looking for a reversal of the Protestant Cromwell's religious reforms, but when Catherine's sexual history was exposed many of them (with the exception of the Duke of Norfolk) were arrested and found guilty of treason. Although initially sentenced to life imprisonment and the forfeiture of goods, they were later released and their goods restored.

Catherine received no such leniency and was beheaded at the age of 19. She has been variously called a 'juvenile delinquent' and an 'empty-headed wanton'. She was certainly an extremely naive girl who found herself completely out of her depth and had no appreciation of the grave danger her sexual frolics would place her in. She died a disgrace to her family, who removed her picture from the Howard portrait gallery.

Catherine Parr (1512–48)

Born into a wealthy northern family and well educated, especially in languages, Catherine Parr led an interesting and varied life, and married four times. At 17 she married Sir Edward Borough, who died

in 1533, and a year later she was married again to John Neville, Lord Latimer, who was a Catholic peer. During the Catholic uprising in Lincolnshire in October 1536 against the dissolution of the monasteries, Latimer was dragged from their home and forced to join the mob, and in January 1537 Catherine was held hostage by Catholic rebels. Latimer eventually returned and succeeded in getting his wife released, but Catherine's anti-Catholic views hardened as a result of this experience. Latimer was later blackmailed by Cromwell for his involvement in the uprising and died in 1543, bestowing on his wife the manor of Stowe and other properties.

A rich widow of 31, Catherine became established in the household of Lady Mary, Henry's daughter, and accepted his proposal of marriage. After Henry's death, she retired to her home at Old Manor in Chelsea, and married in secret her old suitor Thomas Seymour (the brother of Jane Seymour). This met with great displeasure from Lady Mary and King Edward VI's counsellors. Catherine became pregnant for the first time in 1548 when she was 36, but died six days after the birth of a daughter. She left a scholarly contribution in her *Prayers or Meditations* (which became the first book to be published by an English queen under her own name), and the *Lamentacions of a Synner*, which promoted the Protestant concept of justification by faith alone. Her last husband Thomas Seymour was beheaded for treason in 1549.

Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556)

At the age of 14 Cranmer was sent to Jesus College, Cambridge, where he was later ordained and named as one of the university's preachers, and became an admirer of the humanist Erasmus. From 1529 onwards he was involved in advising Wolsey on the theological issues surrounding the 'King's Great Matter', and in 1532 he was appointed the resident ambassador at the court of the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, but unsurprisingly he was unable to persuade Charles to support the annulment of his aunt Catherine's marriage. Despite this failure, Cranmer was appointed the new Archbishop of Canterbury, a promotion secured by the family of Anne Boleyn, whom he had served as family chaplain. In June 1533 it was Cranmer who crowned Anne as queen. When Thomas Cromwell accused Anne of various sexual infidelities in 1536, Cranmer expressed his doubts as to her alleged guilt in a letter to Henry, but it went unheeded. On 16 May he saw Anne in the Tower of London and heard her last confession before pronouncing her marriage to Henry null and void the following day.

In 1539 Cranmer wrote the preface to the new Great Bible in English. He also officiated in the wedding ceremony of Henry and Anne of Cleves, and led the synod which quickly annulled the

marriage. After Cromwell was executed, Cranmer assumed a prominent political position, being delegated the tricky task of telling Henry about the marital indiscretions of Catherine Howard. When several conservative clergymen plotted against him in 1543, Henry showed total support for Cranmer and the plot failed. Cranmer acted as an executor to Henry's final will, and grew a beard, partly in mourning for the king and partly to signify his rejection of the old Catholic Church.

When the death of Edward VI ushered in the Catholic 'Bloody Mary' as queen, the conservative clergy were restored to power. Cranmer was arrested (along with fellow Protestants Hugh Latimer and Nicholas Ridley) and was left to languish in prison in Oxford for two years awaiting trial for heresy, during which Rome deprived him of the archbishopric. Despite a full recantation that should have led to a reprieve under Canon Law, Mary was determined to see him executed, as Latimer and Ridley were. On 21 March 1556 Cranmer was expected to make a final humiliating recantation from the pulpit of the University Church, Oxford, but he deviated from the prepared script and renounced all his previous recantations, saying, 'And as for the Pope, I refuse him, as Christ's enemy, and Antichrist with all his false doctrine.' He was pulled from the pulpit and burned at the stake.

Appendix 2: Timeline

- 1486** Birth of Arthur, Prince of Wales, elder brother of Henry
- 1491** Henry is born in Greenwich on 28 June
- 1501** Arthur marries Catherine of Aragon
- 1502** Arthur dies, leaving Henry as heir
- 1509** Henry accedes to the throne on the death of Henry VII and marries Catherine of Aragon
- 1515** Thomas Wolsey becomes Lord Chancellor
- 1516** Mary, the daughter of King Henry VIII and Queen Catherine, is born
- 1519** Birth of Henry Fitzroy, the illegitimate son of Henry by Elizabeth Blount
- 1520** The Field of Cloth of Gold where King Francis I of France meets Henry
- 1521** Henry receives the title 'Defender of the Faith' from Pope Leo X
- 1529** Thomas Wolsey is dismissed as Lord Chancellor and Thomas More becomes Lord Chancellor
- 1530** Thomas Wolsey dies
- 1533** Henry marries Anne Boleyn, their daughter Elizabeth is born, his first marriage is annulled
- 1534** The Act of Supremacy confirms Henry as Supreme Head of the Church of England
- 1535** Thomas More is executed
- 1536** Catherine of Aragon dies, Anne Boleyn is executed, Henry marries Jane Seymour
- 1537** Jane Seymour dies after giving birth to a son, the future King Edward VI
- 1540** Henry annuls marriage to Anne of Cleves, marries Catherine Howard, Cromwell is executed
- 1542** Catherine Howard is executed
- 1543** Henry marries Catherine Parr, his sixth wife
- 1547** Henry dies on 28 January, aged 55

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